

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
United States Representative, District 1 NM
1505 Longworth House Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20515-3101
Albuquerque: 20 First Plaza, Ste 603, 87102

May 19, 2009

Re: Support for the 150th Fighter Wing Mission

Representative Heinrich:

The New Mexico Air National Guard faces a critical junction with respect to continuation of its historical mission as a fighter unit supporting the nation's defense. The New Mexico Guard needs the assistance of the State's Congressional Delegation, the Governor and the Mayor in order to remain in the F-16 flying mission until the basing decisions with respect to the next generation of F-35 fighters is made. The 150th Fighter Wing has flown single-engine, single seat fighters since its inception in 1947. The unit has distinguished itself on multiple occasions including the Korean War, the Vietnam Conflict, the Bosnian conflict and multiple rotations in the current Iraq operation. During its last deployment to Iraq, the Unit had a 100% weapons effectiveness rating during combat – every weapon dropped in combat hit its intended target. It does not appear that a 100% hit ratio has ever been attained by any other unit in combat in aviation history.

In addition, Kirtland Air Force Base was rated as the number one Air National Guard base in the country for the fighter mission in BRAC 2005. The contributing areas for this rating included proximity to training areas, attributes of those training areas, low level training routes, weather, base infrastructure, and other substantive criteria. These facts should not be overlooked when considering follow-on missions for units. The State of New Mexico is endowed with tremendous airspace and range complexes along with the finest weather in the country for flying.

Unfortunately, these attributes have had little impact in the decision making process within the Air Force. New Mexico was incorrectly removed from consideration as a follow on F-35 fighter base in part based upon an inaccurate concern that the F-35 was limited to bases within an elevation below 5,000' MSL. The issue had to do with maximum tire speed limitation. That early misperception has been addressed and the Air Force and the aircraft manufacturer acknowledge the limitation has little merit. Additionally, the original premise for placing the 150th into the mission change category no longer exists. Air Combat Command assumed that the future Combat Search and Rescue helicopter, or "CSAR X" would be based at Kirtland and the 150th should host the platform. As you know, the CSAR X was identified recently by Secretary Gates as one of the weapons systems to be canceled. Therefore, the entire premise for moving the 150th out of the fighter mission no longer exists. Unfortunately, Kirtland AFB has not been put back in the mix for the F-35 fighter mission based in part because of that issue.

The Air Force currently plans to retire the New Mexico Air National Guard's F-16 aircraft during the next year (FY10 Program Objective Memorandum). On May 11, 2009, the Air Force released its Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Estimate and on page 26 of that document, the Air Force announced its decision to take all the F-16 aircraft from KAFB without any future

mission determined. Doing so brings the legacy of this proud unit to an end. Closing the air national guard flying operations in a state that only has one flying unit is, to our knowledge, an unprecedented action never taken against any state in history. The action also appears to contradict prior written statements made to members of New Mexico's Congressional delegation. On March 13, 2008, Secretary of the Air Force, Michael Wynn wrote to Senator Jeff Bingaman and in his letter he stated:

On January 16, 2008, General Moseley released a portion of his strategic roadmap, his comprehensive long-term plan for basing the next-generation weapons systems. Kirtland Air Force Base is listed as a potential F-35A Lightning II beddown location and I assure you it will be given equal consideration along with other potential F-35A bases (emphasis added).

Each potential location that meets the preliminary requirements will be subject to further analysis, to include thorough environmental studies as mandated by the National Environmental Protection Act.

The representation made to Senator Bingaman does not appear to have been honored. In order to be considered for the future F-35 mission, the base needs to undergo an Environmental Assessment ("EA") and that will not occur based upon decisions made by the Air Force within the past few days.

Make no mistake that loss of the F-16 fighter mission at Kirtland AFB is effectively a BRAC without Congressional oversight. One of the primary reasons that the 150th Fighter Wing has been targeted for loss of its fighter mission is because of its close proximity to the 58th Special Operations Wing ("SOW") at Kirtland AFB. There is no scheduled increase in the number of aircraft at the 58th SOW and therefore the loss of the fighter mission at Kirtland AFB is effectively a net loss of approximately 1,000 jobs at Kirtland AFB. Jobs now held by civilian and military personnel will likely be lost and transferred to Guard personnel presently involved in the F-16 mission. An initial Air Force plan was also to have the 150th Fighter Wing assimilated into the 58th SOW as an interim step until the Combat Search And Rescue ("CSAR-X") helicopter was fielded. It appears that the CSAR-X program will be cancelled based upon the President's recently released budget plans. In the end, it is likely that there will be a dramatic loss of jobs at Kirtland AFB based upon this loss of the fighter mission at the 150th. The 58th SOW performs a valuable mission in support of the nation's defense just as the 150th Fighter Wing. Both units should be maintained at their current strength. The New Mexico Congressional delegation and the governor should also recognize the merit in having two diverse and critical flying operations at Kirtland AFB when responding to future BRAC scrutiny.

In conclusion, we are writing to you to request your assistance to retain the F-16 fighter mission at Kirtland AFB and to insure that Kirtland AFB is given fair consideration for a follow on fighter mission. That requires that: 1) the 150th Fighter Wing be removed from current budget plans to shut down F-16 operations within a year. That task has taken on real urgency in light of the Air Force's announced budget plans; and 2) placement of Kirtland AFB back on to the list of bases under consideration for a future fighter mission; and 3) insistence on an Environmental Assessment at Kirtland AFB to evaluate the base for that future mission. Most of us have directly or indirectly devoted substantial portions of our lives to making the 150th Fighter Wing

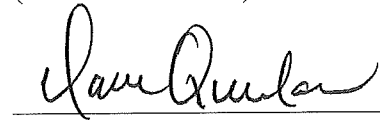
into the proud unit that it is today. That legacy should not be destroyed. Your assistance is urgently needed.



Lt. Gen. Edward Baca (ret.)
(former Chief NGB and NM TAG)



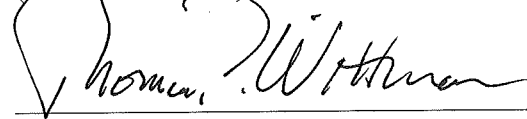
Maj. Gen. Melvin Montano (ret.)
(former NM TAG)



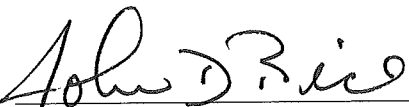
Maj. Gen. Dave Quinlan (ret.) *MEH*
(former NM ATAG)



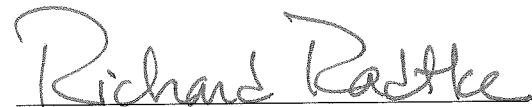
Maj. Gen. Randall Horn (ret.) *MEH*
(former NMTAG)



Brig. Gen. Tom Wittman (ret.)
(former NM ATAG)



Brig. Gen. Mike Rice (ret.) *MEH*
(former NM ATAG)



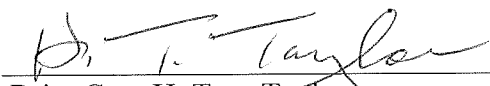
Brig. Gen. Rick Radtke *MEH*
(former NM ATAG)



Brig. Gen. Martin Holland (ret.)
(former Chief of Staff NMNG)



Maj. Gen. Frank Miles (ret.) *MEH*
(former NM TAG)




Brig. Gen. H. Tom Taylor
(former NMArNG 111th Brigade Cmdr.)



Brig. Gen. George Treadwell (ret.) *MEH*
(former NMArNG 111th Brigade Cmdr.)



Brig. Gen. Steve Stevens (ret.)
(former NMArNG 111th Brigade Cmdr.)



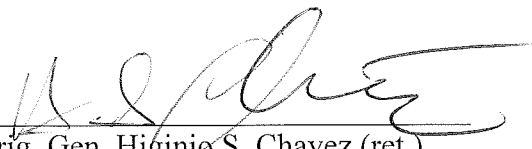
Brig. Gen. Jamie Fletcher (ret.) *MEH*
(former NMArNG 111th Brigade Cmdr.)



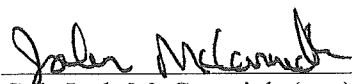
Brig. Gen. Robert Martinez (ret.)
(former DTAG NMNG)




Brig. Gen. Mark Dow (ret.)
(former DTAG NMNG)



Brig. Gen. Higinio S. Chavez (ret.)
(former NM ATAG)



Col. Jack McCormick (ret.) *me*
(former 150th FW CC)



Col. Bill White (ret.) *me*
(former 150th FW CC)